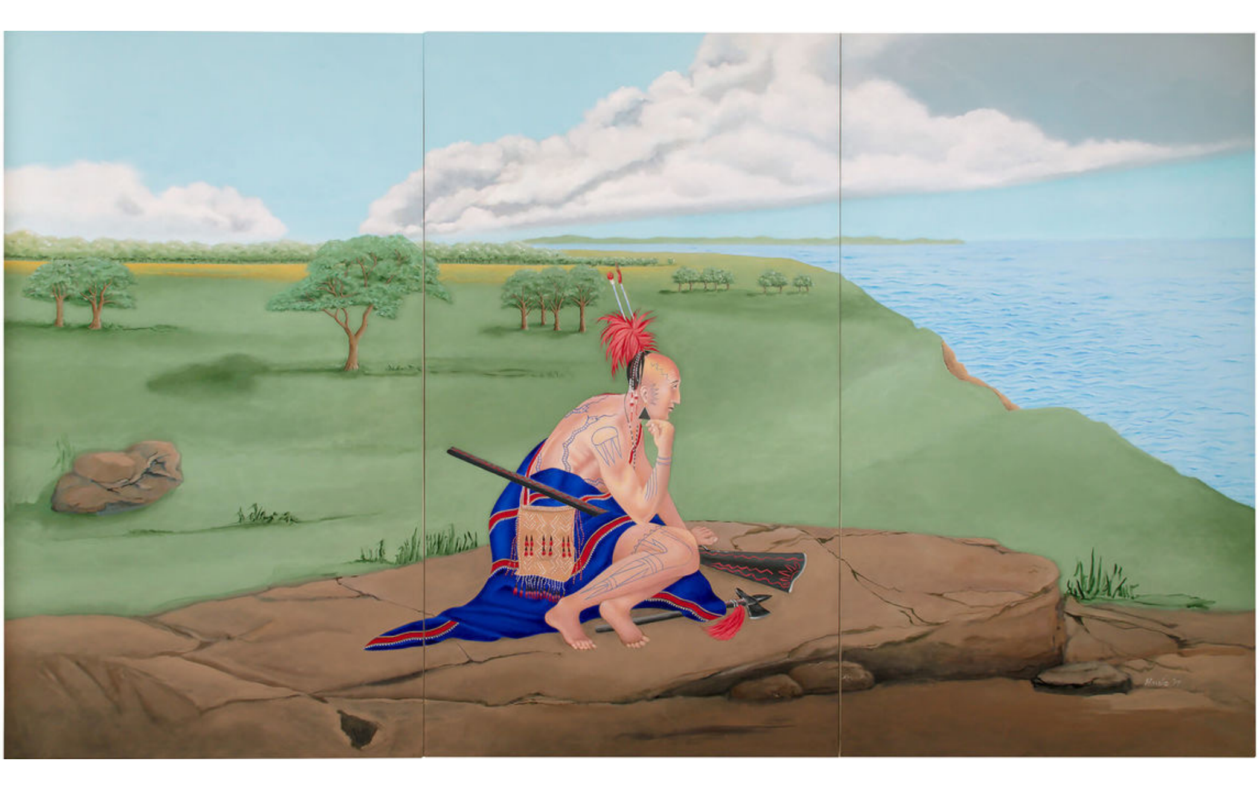
ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

SEEING THE PAST THROUGH ART
CANADA HISTORY WEEK

How Canadian artists have captured, questioned, and reshaped the nation's history through their work—with classroom-ready resources that encourage students to ask critical questions about whose stories are remembered and retold.



Robert Houle, *O-ween du muh waun (We Were Told)*, 2017.

At the Art Canada Institute, we approach history through the lens of art—tracing how artists have recorded lived experiences, challenged official narratives, and offered new ways of understanding Canada's past. To mark Canada History Week, which begins on November 17, in this month's newsletter we bring together a selection of resources that connect art and history in the classroom. From C.D. Hoy's photographs capturing life in Western Canada to Prudence Heward's portraits of twentieth-century women and from Robert Houle's explorations of decolonization to Paul-Émile Borduas's vision of social change, these guides invite students to consider how images reflect the values, conflicts, and transformations that define Canada—and how artists continue to shape the stories that make up our shared history.

Start exploring our Teacher Resource Guides

— The Art Canada Institute Education Team

AVENUES TO EXPLORE

A Lens on History

C.D. Hoy, *C.D. Hoy and Josephine Alexander*, c.1915.

Chinese Canadian photographer C.D. (Chow Dong) Hoy (1883–1973) created a vivid record of early life in British Columbia, capturing the diversity and resilience of his Indigenous and settler neighbours, friends, and community newcomers. His rich photographic documentation is a valuable resource for classroom discussion centered on this significant moment in Western Canada's history, providing students with the opportunity to develop research and critical thinking skills as they uncover the personal stories behind Hoy's remarkable portraits.

Download the Teacher Resource Guide here

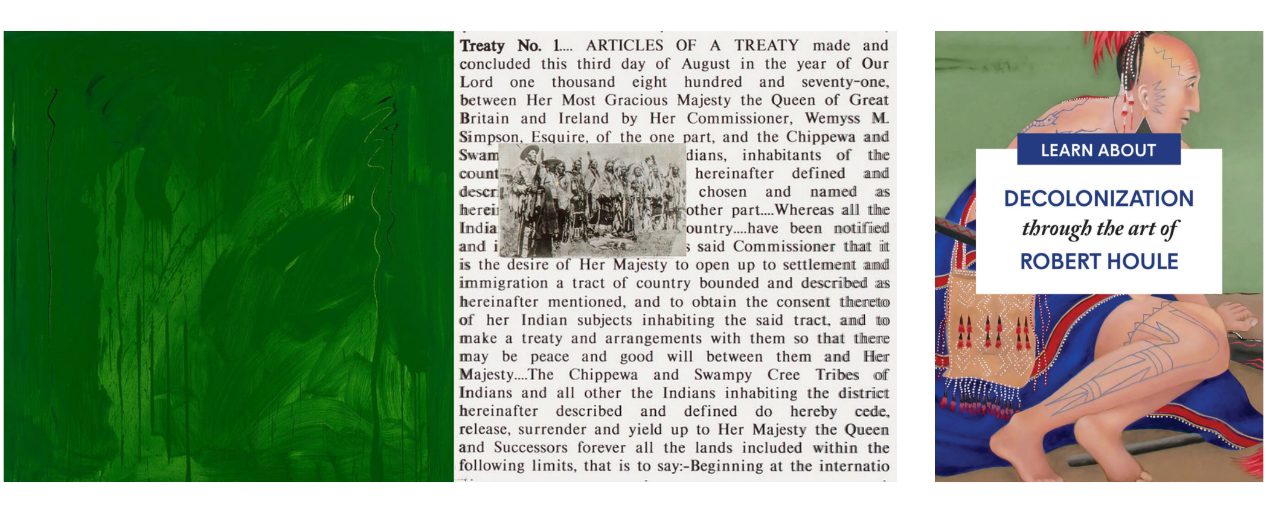
Women in Focus

Prudence Heward, *The Emigrants*, c.1928.

Montreal-born painter Prudence Heward (1896–1947) challenged the conventions of her time with bold, unapologetic portraits of modern women. In works such as *The Emigrants*, c.1928, Heward offered a window into the shifting roles and expectations for women in the early twentieth century—from domestic ideals before the First World War to newfound independence and public visibility after it. Her work invites students to draw connections between these historical transformations and ongoing conversations about gender, identity, and representation.

Download the Teacher Resource Guide here

Promises and Relations



Robert Houle, *Premises for Self-Rule: Treaty No. 1*, 1994.

Robert Houle (b.1947), a leading Anishinaabe Saulteaux artist from Sandy Bay First Nation, Treaty 1 Territory, has spent his career reimagining how Canada's colonial history is seen and felt. In works such as *Premises for Self-Rule*, 1994, Houle asserts First Nations' historic and legal connections to the land, transforming the treaty into a meditation on sovereignty and survival. His art exposes the structures of colonial power while asserting Indigenous self-determination as both a personal and collective act of reclamation. In the classroom, Houle's work invites students to examine decolonization not as a single event, but as an ongoing process—one that challenges, heals, and redefines narratives that shape Canada's past, present, and future.

Download the Teacher Resource Guide here

Voices of Change

Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Black Star* (*L'étoile noire*), 1957.

Paul-Émile Borduas (1905–60)—artist, teacher, and outspoken visionary—used art as a catalyst for social change in mid-century Quebec. As founder of the abstract Automatiste movement and co-author of the 1948 manifesto *Refus global*, he called for freedom of expression and denounced the repressive influence of the Church and state under Premier Maurice Duplessis. Decades later, his words helped ignite Quebec's Quiet Revolution, reshaping the province's cultural and political landscape. Through his abstract works such as *The Black Star*, 1957, students can explore how Borduas and his circle transformed artistic rebellion into a broader movement for personal and social liberation.

Download the Teacher Resource Guide here

As a bilingual organization, we are proud to offer our materials in both French and English, including this newsletter. Use the sign up links below to receive emails in your preferred language.

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About the Art Canada Institute

Launched in 2013, the Art Canada Institute is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, in both English and French, within Canada and internationally. The ACI works with more than fifty of Canada's leading art historians, curators, and visual culture experts who are dedicated to the creation of authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

We are creating a central digital resource to tell the world about Canada's most important works of art and where they are located. By functioning as an online art museum, a digital library, and an interactive Canadian art encyclopedia, the ACI is an indispensable resource on Canada's visual heritage.

Visit us at aci-iac.ca

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